

Remarks

Reconsideration and reversal of the rejections expressed in the Office Action of July 11, 2005 are respectfully contended in view of the following remarks and the application as amended. The present invention relates to a method for reducing the amount of particles and residues in photomasks.

Claims 1, 3-8, and 10-17 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Nagamura et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,071,376, or "the '376 patent."). The Office Action states that relative to these claims, the reference does not teach the ratio and the number of cleaning cycles as claimed.

The '376 patent relates to a method and apparatus for cleaning a photomask which removes residual agents (mainly sulfuric acid) from the surface of a photomask after a cleaning step, improving the quality of photomask. Applicants respectfully contend that there is no teaching or suggestion in the reference that the number of multiple cleaning cycles exercised on a particular photomask without degradation could be greater than about ten cleaning cycles. Furthermore, based on the teachings of the '376 patent, there is no reasonable expectation of success associated with such cleaning cycles, as disclosed and claimed in the present invention. Thus, prima facie obviousness is not established.

Claims 1, 3-7 and 10-13 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Hanson et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,472,516, or "the '516 patent"). As previously stated, note that Applicants' invention as presently claimed defines a method for reducing the amount of particles and residues in photomasks by inter alia, providing a photomask having patterned metal layers; treating the photomask with a cleaning process; removing particles greater than about 0.2 microns while removing a minimal amount of patterned metal layers; and exercising the cleaning process on a particular photomask for a multiple number of cleaning cycles without degradation of the photomask.

The '516 patent discloses a method for cleaning wafers which are not photomasks. Applicants respectfully contend that this reference is inapplicable to the cleaning of photomasks, as disclosed and claimed in the present invention. Therefore, prima facie obviousness is not established.

For all of the above reasons, it is respectfully contended that the solicited claims define patentable subject matter. Reconsideration and reversal of the rejections expressed in the Office Action of July 11, 2005 are respectfully submitted. The Examiner is invited to call the undersigned if any questions arise during the course of reconsideration of this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

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